

To: the ECA-members  
From: Working Group 2  
Re: the impact of accreditation

Dear colleagues,

During its meeting of October 14th 2009, Working Group 2 discussed the possibilities of making an impact study on the work of the accreditation organisations. We came to the conclusion that it would be worthwhile to try and write a report on the impact and efficacy of our work. We realized however that this would be a major task since the evidence of impact and efficacy seems scarce and certainly not gathered in a very systematic way. So we have been looking for a pragmatic way of gathering bits and pieces of information.

We have discussed a matrix of “levels of impact” and of “stakeholders”.

The “levels of impact” we have divided into four different categories:

1. The quality of teaching and learning of a programme or a group of programmes; this might be the expression of the accountability effect (“the programmes or groups of programmes have past the threshold of basic quality”) or an effect of enhancement (“The accreditation procedure has contributed to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning”);
2. The quality of the internal QA-system, which will have an impact on the structural enhancement of quality. We might call this our contribution to “quality culture”;
3. The international trust in the H.E.-sector. Politicians, labour market, students and their parents, the press, might get more trust in the sector of H.E. through the work of the accreditation agencies. That might lead to a “buffer” between the H.E.-sector and society, which might help the autonomous H.E.-sector not to be forced to respond on each and every incident that happens;
4. The international trust in the national H.E.-sector. Other countries, HEI's, foreign students, employers will trust the H.E.-sector in country A, which will help this country and HEI's in, for instance, internationalisation. Together this would also lead tot trust in “European H.E.”, which would support the European agenda of forming an European Higher Education Area.

The “stakeholders” have been divided into 8 categories:

1. the student. He/she is of course happy to know that a course or programme meets the (inter)national standard of at least basic quality;
2. the individual programme, which will like to be accredited in order to be a legitimate part of the H.E.-system (Think for instance of the private HEI's!);
3. the individual HEI, which will like to have its programmes accredited in order to be a legitimate part of the H.E.-system. (Again, think of the private HEI's);
4. the H.E.-sector itself, in order to be “trusted” by society;
5. politics, to know that it will get “value for money” and that the H.E.-sector is responsive to the political wish to “deliver quality”;
6. labour market, to be sure that students will be “fit for society”;
7. society as a whole, to be sure that the taxpayers’ money is spent well and that the education is up to standard;
8. “the international community” to know that country A is worthwhile going to for H.E. and that its students would be apt to receive them in your own programmes or courses.

Together, these two axis would lead to the following matrix:

	The quality of teaching and learning	The quality of the internal QA-system	The international trust in the H.E.-sector	The international trust in the national H.E.-sector
the student				
the individual programme				
the individual HEI				
the H.E.-sector itself				
politics				
labour market				
society as a whole				
“the international community”				

The discussion in the Working Group led us to believe that the ECA-partners could all contribute to help to “fill the matrix”. During our discussions we distinguished three types of “evidences” for the impact of our work:

1. empirical data from our work itself

- reaccreditations and the improvement between two accreditations
- recommendations and their “follow up”
- “conditions” in conditional accreditations and the way programmes/HEI’s responded to them
- system-wide analyses
- the reports and decisions themselves.

2. questionnaires/evaluations

- evaluations among panel members, HEI’s
- impact study, like ZEVA will conduct

3. “evidence” by “third parties”

- reports, like a CHEPS-report on the perceived effects of NVAO-accreditations for foreign countries
- political discussions in parliament

Question: are ECA-members interested in this topic and if yes would they be willing to assist/help/feed Working Group 2 with all bits of evidence to be able to fill the matrix?

Objectives: to write a report for the INQAAHE-conference of april 2011 in Madrid  
to write a report for the next ministerial “Bologna” conference.

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